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December 30, 2014

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Cynthia A. Harding, M.P.H.  
Interim Director



SUBJECT: **INFLUENZA PREVENTION AND INFLUENZA STRAIN (H3N2) VIRUSES**

This memorandum is to provide an update on prevention of influenza (flu), the recent federal announcement regarding disease caused by the most active flu strains in the United States, and steps the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) is taking in response.

### Background

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently provided information about disease caused by influenza A H3N2 viruses that are not included in this season's vaccine. The CDC distributed a Health Advisory on December 3, 2014 reporting that over half of the influenza A H3N2 viruses tested were a "drifted" strain that is not included in the current flu vaccine. To date, the majority of influenza viruses tested at the CDC have been type A H3N2. This is important because: 1) in seasons where influenza A H3N2 predominates, disease is more severe and more deaths occur; and 2) flu vaccine is less likely to be effective because of reduced protection for the drifted strain.

CDC continues to recommend flu vaccination for everyone six months of age and older. Flu vaccine protects against flu viruses that have not undergone drift, and may provide some protection or reduce the severity of disease caused by the drifted virus. In addition, DPH and CDC continue to emphasize flu prevention through good hand hygiene, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying home when sick. For those who develop flu-like illness, antiviral medications are recommended for hospitalized or high risk patients to reduce the duration and severity of illness and its complications.

### Local Impact

Flu activity is increasing in California. National data on overall vaccine effectiveness will only be available later in the flu season, and DPH's current routine testing of flu specimens in Los Angeles County (LAC) does not determine if the flu strains locally are drifted. DPH continues to monitor for flu-like illness, confirmed flu infection, and flu hospitalizations and deaths in LAC.

## **DPH Response Actions**

DPH is taking the following actions to respond to this issue in LAC:

- 1) On December 5, 2014, DPH sent out an LA Health Alert Network (LAHAN) notification to healthcare providers, forwarding the CDC health advisory, highlighting the key messages, and providing guidance on reporting to the Acute Communicable Disease Control program (ACDC).
- 2) On December 9, 2014 the LAHAN was posted on the ACDC website. Throughout the flu season, the website will be updated with local and national data on flu illness, virus types, and key messages on vaccination, antiviral drug therapy, and behavioral approaches to prevention.
- 3) ACDC summarized the Health Alert in the December 12, 2014 issue of Influenza Watch, DPH's newsletter summarizing flu and respiratory virus activity, distributed to over 600 health care providers, public health professionals, and the general public, available at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/FluSurveillance.htm>.
- 4) ACDC will provide information to healthcare providers through established partnerships with healthcare facilities (hospitals and skilled nursing facilities) and clinic networks in the community, and will continue to respond to questions from healthcare providers and facilities.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please let me know:

CAH:rkf

c: Interim Chief Executive Officer  
County Counsel  
Acting Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors